

Peter Vermeersch**Background: the historical and intellectual development of the study of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe****How the Roma historically emerged as a topic of academic study**

The Roma, a population group that includes many of Central and Eastern Europe's most socio-economically vulnerable citizens (see [EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2012](#): 80–81, [OSCE 2013](#), [World Bank 2013](#)), are not a new topic of study in the social sciences. For a long time, however, the plight of the region's Roma populations did not receive much attention from either politicians or academicians. In anthropology, for example, the Roma were often the subject of amateurish folklore ([Stewart 2013](#)), a fact that may have been related to the particular image attached to them – they were depicted as 'social outcasts and scapegoats, or, in a flattering but far from illuminating light, as romantic outsiders' in many accounts ([Lucassen, Willems and Cottaar 1998](#): 1). In the 1970s and 1980s more sophisticated anthropological and sociological accounts of Romani communities ([Acton 1979](#), [Okely 1983](#), [Puxon 1977](#), [Ulč 1988](#)) increased the profile of what came later to be known as 'Romani studies', which is now a broad interdisciplinary field attracting attention from scholars from a variety of specialisations from across the social sciences and the humanities ([Acton 2000](#), [Guy 2001](#), [Matras 2012](#)). Current research efforts include not only small-scale ethnographic investigations but also large-scale studies focusing on the socio-economic position of the Roma, which highlight, for example, issues of employment (e.g. [Kertesi and Kézdi 2011](#)), housing and residential segregation (e.g. [Sýkora 2009](#)), migration and mobility (e.g. [Grill 2012](#), [Matras 2000](#), [Vidra 2013](#), [Vullnetari 2012](#)), poverty and social mobility (e.g. [van Baar 2012a](#), [Szalai and Zentai 2014](#)), education (e.g. [Kling and Brüggemann 2012](#), [Brüggemann 2012](#)), culture and language (e.g. [Mundy and Acton 1997](#)), political activism and participation ([Barany 2002](#), [Kovats 2000](#), [McGarry and Agarín 2014](#), [Vermeersch 2006](#)), and discrimination (e.g. [Fox and Vidra 2014](#)). In recent years there has been a surge of country case studies, policy reports, and efforts by international governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to collect reliable socio-economic data.

In this chapter, I will provide a very brief introduction to some of the main discussions in the field, pointing out how a topic at the margins of social science research has gradually begun to occupy a more important position. Yet, while there is now a broad literature available, stereotypical views of the Roma persist – also in academic writing – and there continues to be a lack of reliable empirical data on many of the problems that face the Roma. There continues to be a need of high-quality studies on issues related to the Roma since such research may influence current policy debates on local, national, and European levels.

Prior to considering in some detail the existing social science literature that analyses the plight of the Roma (the socio-economic situation of the Roma, the politics around Romani identity, migration and mobility of Roma, and European Roma-related policy formation), it is instructive to consider briefly the history of how the Roma have become a subject of growing scholarly attention. This development has itself been the topic of some research.

[Van Baar \(2012b\)](#), for example, goes back to the time of the Enlightenment to examine how researchers and governments have discovered, addressed, and ‘problematised’ this population – and how this research has always somehow been implicated in state practices of population control. He discusses pioneering Central European ‘Gypsy scholars’ Johann Rüdiger (1751–1822) and Heinrich Grellmann (1753–1804), who attempted to prove scientifically that the Roma have Indian roots and, on the basis of that discovery, formulated opinions about how governments should deal with them – Rüdiger was critical of the assimilationist approaches of the Habsburg rulers, while Grellmann praised them. So even in those times, research on Roma happened in response to or in preparation of policy development. In later times, the link between research and policy would sometimes become problematic up to the point of tragedy. [Willems \(1997\)](#) has written extensively about the detrimental role of the German youth psychiatrist Robert Ritter and his associates in the latter half of the 1930s. Ritter tried to establish a causal connection between biological traits of Roma and antisocial behaviour. Inspired by Nazi ideology, he argued that ‘Romani genes’ had affected the German ‘race’ and in this way had led to the creation of people ‘of mixed blood.’ Eugenic and racial hygiene arguments were used to provide license to state practices of sterilisation, deportation, and mass murder ([Burleigh 2000](#): 372–374, [Nečas 1999](#)).

Careful and detailed reflection on the history of how the Roma have been conceptualised as a subject of scholarly study is needed to understand the sensitivities underlying the discussions about this in current Romani studies. Contemporary scholars working on Roma are often well aware of the fact that the dominant (though by no means unanimous) view is that there is a tight, even inherent, link between the name ‘Roma’ and socio-economic marginalisation. This link is reinforced by politicians and the media when they focus on Romani poverty and the social ills it begets (often blaming the Roma for their own predicament) ([Stewart 2013](#), [Vermeersch 2012](#), [Sigona 2005](#)). Those who do not fit the socio-economic mould are often not even ‘visible’ as Roma ([van Baar and Vermeersch 2015](#)).

In a context where stigma is both historically and socio-economically prevalent, it is not a surprise that a lot of scholars working on Roma spend considerable time discussing how to define the group they want to study. Current views about how to conceptualise Roma diverge not only on terms of whether it make sense to talk about common descent as the basis of Romani identity, and how to read, against this background, the problematic influence of earlier researchers who defined them on the basis of biological, cultural, or socio-economic traits. They are also about broader epistemological questions (How do we understand ethnicity?) and normative strategies (Which analytic approach to Romani identity best prevents the reinforcement of a colonial ‘orientalising’ gaze?). The work of

[Matras \(2012\)](#), on the one hand, highlights the importance of linguistic commonality not only because language can (and in his view should) be regarded as the basis on which Romani identity has historically been formed, but also because the current recognition of common linguistic origins may be a good way towards claiming rights for Roma and counteracting negative stereotypes (which usually presume typical forms of social behaviour). [Lucassen et al. \(1998\)](#), on the other hand, have focused on the labelling practices of authorities (their empirical research mostly pertains to Germany), which over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has lumped together different groups with a similar lifestyle under one overarching ethnic label (*Zigeuner*). They suggest that it makes little sense – historically and politically – to think about Romani identity in terms of common descent or linguistic commonality; we should see this identity instead as a constructed category to which authorities have assigned negative meaning.

Scholars who propagate the linguistic and cultural approach might find themselves in agreement with the ultimate concern of those who highlight socio-economic and political factors of identity formation – both sides seek to free up Romani identity from the stigmatising images that are usually associated with it – but the debate remains. Should the Roma be regarded as a group constructed by internal processes of identity formation on the basis of common language and culture, or should they be seen as a group formed by external forces, including categorisation schemes imposed on them by authorities and scholars? That the discussion on this continues is to some extent related to the particular puzzle that researchers seem to be faced with when they undertake empirical research on the situation of the Roma – although there are clearly patterns of mutual identification among the Roma across national borders (and indeed, one could say, a sense of common belonging), such identity exists and persists ‘without shared religion, without any form of ritual or political leadership, and without overarching or underpinning political organization’ ([Stewart 2013](#): 418). Many have seen in this persistence a sign of the continuing discrimination against the Roma: socio-economic exclusion solidifies them as a single group, and *ethnifies* or *racialises* them. Others have rather understood this persistence as proof of a strong common culture and belief in common descent, which survives even in the face of external forces stigmatizing their identity. They have argued that the political recognition of such cultural commonalities will bring emancipatory power.

Although the problem of essentialising (and exoticising) the Roma – that is, seeing them as a historically unchanged and unadapted group whose members wilfully refuse the norms and values of society at large – is still present in some (certainly the most stereotypical) writings about Roma, there is among students of the plight of the Roma (including those who argue for the public recognition of common Romani descent and culture) a growing agreement that it makes sense to view Romani identity – as any form of ethnicity – not simply as a matter of isolated group characteristics, but rather as the product of complex classification processes involving both classifiers and those classified as Roma ([Emigh, Fodor and Szelényi 2001](#): 6). In this way, it is also easier to make sense of prevailing exonyms that are used to refer to more or less the same population (such names as Gypsy, *Zigeuner*, and *Tsigane*); their equivalents in the Eastern European

languages (such as cigán, cikán, cigány, etc.), and the self-appellations that serve as subidentities (such as Kalderash, Manush, Caló, Vlach, Romungro, Beash, Sinto, etc.). All these categories relate in some way to the overarching term Roma – a term that has historically served as a self-appellation for speakers of the Romani language (sometimes called Romanes) but is now used to encompass a wider group of people, including those who do not speak Romanes but for socio-cultural or political reasons still identify themselves, or are identified by others, as belonging to this group.

Eastern Europe and the discovery of the Roma as a topic of social scientific study

Since a large majority of the estimated 8–12 million Roma in the world live in Central and Eastern Europe, it should not come as a surprise that a lot of the research has taken place in this region. Some of that work predates 1989. There have been sociological studies of varying quality about the position of the Roma in several Central and Eastern European countries throughout the communist era. Such scholarship has often been dependent on specific interests and traditions at certain academic institutions. In Bulgaria, for example, [Marushiakova and Popov \(1997\)](#) have done a lot of work before 1989 that perhaps can be called historical ethnography. There have been important strands of sociological and anthropological research in communist Hungary ([Havas and Kemény 1999](#)) and Czechoslovakia ([Davidová 1995](#)). For much of the time, however, the topic did retain a certain obscurity. When in 1975, the Czech exiled photographer Josef Koudelka published a selection of sixty photographs taken in various Roma settlements around East Slovakia, he could still have been considered a pioneer – someone who brought the topic from the margins to the centre of serious attention. He chose to accompany his expressive black and white photography with a social scientific essay documenting the situation of the Roma in Czechoslovakia ([Koudelka 2011](#)).

In 1971, survey research by Hungarian sociologists found that the socio-economic situation of those who were called ‘Gypsies’ was highly problematic. They found, for example, that housing was extremely poor. ‘Nearly two thirds (65.1 per cent) of Gypsy households were located in separate colonies. In 1971, the majority of these could be described as spontaneously erected, family-built shanties, traditionally situated away from, or on the fringe of, towns or villages. They lacked even the most basic facilities ([Havas and Kemény 1999](#): 366). The survey was replicated in 1993, and the conclusion then was that the problem was getting worse. Thus, in the Hungarian case it is clear that policies to alleviate the problems facing the Roma predate 1989 but also that some of the misconceptions about how to help Roma date from those earlier periods. While the Roma were in some cases slightly better off during the communist era – they were sometimes even seen as ‘beneficiaries’ of the planned economy – the policies that were directed at them were not implemented in such a way that remedied the structural inequality ([Emigh et al. 2001](#)). During the communist era, social scientists in Hungary, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, might have had an idea of the extent of the socio-economic plight of the Roma, but they were limited in their opportunities to communicate their conclusions with the wider world.

The topic rose to prominence internationally in the social sciences in the 1990s, in the wake of growing concern about discrimination and stark socio-economic exclusion of large sections of the Roma in the context of democratisation and market transition. Journalist accounts of extremism and the fate of vulnerable groups (e.g. [Hockenos 1993](#)) and publications by human rights organisations – international NGOs like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Project on Ethnic Relations, and the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) – helped to raise awareness about the alarming levels of discrimination and marginalisation. It became clear that marginalised Roma had become trapped in urban slums or isolated ghettos in rural areas where a situation had arisen that is likely to perpetuate exclusion and poverty ([Sobotka and Vermeersch, 2012](#): 813). Over the years many anti-Roma initiatives, policies, and mobilisations have been documented. Examples include the building of walls separating Roma neighbourhoods from other sections of a town (as happened, for example, in the Czech town of Ústí nad Labem in 1999), the illegal registration of the ethnic background of clients and potential employees at private companies and the public sector (in 2006, ERRC documented several cases of this across Europe [[Hyde 2006](#)]), the practice in several countries of segregating Roma children in special schools or classes (in 2007, the Czech Republic was convicted for this type of discrimination in a landmark judgment of the European Court of Human Rights [*D. H. and Others v. The Czech Republic*]), and the expulsion and ethnic resettlement campaigns directed at Roma migrants in the EU (e.g. France decided in 2010 to shut down a large number of irregular Roma dwellings and single out Bulgarian and Romanian Roma for an expulsion campaign) ([Vermeersch 2011](#)). Growing scholarly attention also went hand in hand with greater concern from some governmental actors, a fact that was arguably stimulated by the international concern for interstate conflict around national minorities. New reporting on the situation of the Roma happened at a time when the violent conflicts in the Balkans had broken out, and fear of territorial secessions by national minorities in response to majority nationalism was generally regarded as a troubling dynamic that could lead to war and migration. The risk that an ethnic conflict involving Roma would develop into a war between two or more states was deemed minimal, yet growing media coverage of all kinds of tensions around the lack of protection for this group, and the growth of a ‘racialised’ underclass ([Emigh et al. 2001](#)), did lead to some important new texts and initiatives by international institutions such as the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Where we are now: studies of Roma in Eastern Europe after 1989

Understanding exclusion and discrimination

In 2000 and 2001, research by the World Bank concluded that, overall, poverty among Roma is closely linked to four main factors: (1) regional economic conditions; (2) the size and concentration of the Romani population in a settlement; (3) the percentage of Roma in a settlement; and (4) the degree of geographic integration or segregation of the settlement and its proximity to a neighbouring village or town ([Ringold 2002](#)). We have now come to a point in time when research is increasingly responding to the need for more detailed figures and analysis related to Roma exclusion. Several attempts at more

specific mapping and data collection have been undertaken (e.g. [EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2012](#), [Kósa et al. 2007](#), [Milcher 2006](#), [Molnár, Adány, Adám, Gulis and Kósa 2010](#), [UNDP Bratislava 2013](#), [Vuksanović-Macura 2012](#)) and various studies have now developed detailed indicators to confirm that Romani communities across Europe live on average in more dire economic circumstances than their co-citizens. These studies also allow for a better understanding of how socio-economic marginalisation affects multiple spheres of life and how problems of ill health, poverty, unemployment, and segregation are interconnected. Particularly telling are the data on the socio-economic conditions, experiences of discrimination, and rights awareness of Roma that have been compiled in eleven EU member states in 2011 through the ‘pilot survey’ of the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) (in collaboration with the World Bank and UNDP). The survey interviewed 10,811 Roma and 5,508 non-Roma living nearby, and the results are made available the website of the FRA (<http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/roma>). It might seem puzzling that the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. Scholars and activists have argued that underlying the failure of social policies to remedy this situation is a lack of will of national politicians to prioritise the issue and the persistence of discriminatory attitudes among the majority of their voters. Even if welfare and social inclusion policies mostly stay under the control of the individual states ([Schall 2012](#)), it has become clear that the social inclusion of Roma is a matter on which the EU cannot remain passive.

In recent years the issue of persistent discrimination against the Roma seems to have become an even more vexing puzzle for social scientists. Over the last few years the Roma appear to have become increasingly politicised and as such have become the focus of populism and extremism throughout Central and Eastern Europe ([Stewart 2012](#)). In Hungary, for example, the level of negative stereotypical attitudes about the Roma now appears to exceed that of the 1990s, which was quite high even then ([Csepeli, Fábíán and Sik 1998](#)). Since far-right and populist parties gained strength in 2006, anti-Roma discourse and behaviour have even become more popular, with authorities remarkably reluctant to provide any form of counteraction. Local governments, in particular, seem to have become largely permissive to the language of hatred and incitement against Roma (for example, [Zolnay 2012](#)).

In several countries in the region not only is the lack of clear and implemented anti-discrimination policies to blame, or the fact that politicians use anti-Romani discourse as a way to gain votes; the economic inequality is perpetuated by other types of exclusion as well. Education is a case in point, and some researchers have focused their work on this specific subdomain. There are several studies discussing, mapping, and demonstrating the problematic character of pervasive educational segregation across several Central and Eastern European countries – from schools in poor Romani neighbourhoods or the placement of Romani pupils in so-called special schools for children with developmental disabilities or in separate classrooms (e.g. [Rostas 2012](#)). Up to this date, there has been little to report in terms of change. While the legality of selection practices has been severely contested – the European Court of Human Rights issued groundbreaking judgements against the Czech Republic (2007) and Greece (2008) – many actors in the education systems of several countries are not interested in reform, and Romani parents

often remain uninformed about the consequences of segregation or see the short-term benefits of not having to seek acceptance among majority populations in a more diverse schooling system.

While the educational segregation persists, there have been international initiatives that have tried to make some progress in changing general attitudes. The Roma Education Fund, for example, is an international foundation that runs the largest tertiary education scholarship programme for Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. The Fund operates four scholarship schemes in fifteen countries. Since their inception in 2004, the programmes have provided support to about 5,000 Roma students. Some of these students may, in the future, themselves become active in research on the inclusion of Roma in education.

The study of Roma minority politics, activism, and participation

There is a branch of research in Romani studies that focuses on how Romani activists and their supporters respond to the Roma's grievances (e.g. [Vermeersch 2006](#), [McGarry 2010](#), [Kovats 2000](#)). A growing number of Roma are involved in various forms of political and social activism, often in self-organised civil society groups. There are no exact figures on the number of Roma civil society organisations in Central and Eastern Europe – ERRC has collected dozens of links to Roma civil society organisations and organizations supportive of Roma in about thirty countries (www.errc.org/links-to-ngos-and-roma-media), but that list is far from exhaustive since it only includes active websites run by organisations that have submitted a link to the ERRC. It is likely that in about every municipality where a substantive part of the population is Roma, there exists some form of Roma organisation. The most effective Roma organisations, however, are internationally organised, such as the European Roma and Travellers Forum (established in France in 2004 with the support of the Council of Europe) or umbrella organisations and networks of NGOs. Examples of the latter are the European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network (ERGO), located in Brussels and bringing together twenty-six organizations from different European countries, and the International Roma Youth Network (ternYpe) in Berlin, gathering at least ten Roma youth organisations from across Europe. Many of these international civil society initiatives are supported by international donors, such as the National Democratic Institute or the Open Society Foundation. Romani organisations have also increasingly been part of a transnational advocacy networks on Romani inclusion that has had some impact on the development of EU policies in this field. Romani communities are also active with regards to protest. Throughout Europe, some of the most visible demonstrations in response to targeted expulsion and migration control strategies have been led by Roma and supporting non-Roma organisations and groups.

Some of the findings in this strand of research relate to the quantitative growth of Romani political participation. For example, the number of Roma who participate in local elections as candidates has markedly increased over the recent years. In Slovakia, for example, the number of Romani candidates increase with each local, regional, or parliamentary election – the local is especially significant (for example, [Degro 2015](#)).

Some of the research in this field is concerned with the quality of participation. Various international institutions have written reports to emphasise that Romani participation and consultation are critical in the design and implementation of policy programmes meant to address the problems facing Roma. Nevertheless, studies point out that growing attention for Romani policy input is not necessarily a sign of the real acceptance of a Romani voice in mainstream politics and policymaking. [McGarry and Agarín \(2014\)](#), for instance, have argued that, although policymakers often talk about Romani participation in policy design and implementation, they usually refrain from specifying what exactly this means in practice ([van Baar and Vermeersch 2015](#)). Such forms of Romani participation often turn out to be ‘thin’ and may be a form of tokenism.

The study of Romani migration

Roma have often been associated with intra-national mobility and cross-border migration. This has at several times been prominent in the academic writing about Roma. Being a complex and multi-faceted topic, it has also led to confusion with the larger audience. Two popular but faulty assumptions persist: that Romani migration from east to west is massive; and that Roma are culturally and inherently inclined towards mobility. Especially in Central and Eastern Europe Roma are usually not nomadic. As [Matras \(2000\)](#) has argued, what is remarkable about much of the Romani migration in Europe is that it has happened despite a lack of nomadic traditions. In addition, the extent of Romani migration is often exaggerated, which may be caused by a number of other factors: lack of precise official numbers, for example, and arguably also the high visibility, the relatively high level of internal cohesion, and the severe poverty of the Romani communities who are on the move ([Vermeersch 2013](#): 347). For example, it has been pointed out that, according to estimates, the number of Roma in France has remained between 15,000 and 20,000 since the early 2000s ([Muiznieks 2015](#)); opportunities for internal mobility within the EU did not change that figure substantially. While in some areas there has been a visible influx of Roma, the overall Roma migration tends to follow the extent of general East-West migration in Europe. It is useful to consider the results of the Roma Pilot Survey of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency on attitudes towards migration. The average number of Roma respondents who said they would consider to move to another country was 15 per cent, while that of non-Roma living nearby was 12 per cent. The urge to move was not that different from non-Roma populations in the same areas, despite highly different experiences at home. The share of Roma respondents who had experienced discrimination in the previous five years was much higher than that of non-Roma living nearby (on average, 46 per cent among Roma and 4 per cent among non-Roma) (see <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-results-2011-roma-survey>).

It is important to make a distinction between various forms of Roma migration. On the one hand, itinerant groups in Western Europe, such as the Gens du Voyage in France, are national citizens of the countries in which they travel and usually migrate across a limited number of national borders as part of their normal travel routes. On the other hand, Romani citizens who do not live in caravans, and do not have (or do not seek) an itinerant lifestyle, may still migrate within a country to seek economic improvement, but usually

they do not have the means to do this. They lack opportunities both for territorial or social mobility. In turn, these groups are not to be confused with another, third, category: those Roma who are citizens of an EU member state and make use of the opportunities for free movement within the EU to go to another member state with a plan to live there for a longer stretch of time ([Grill 2012](#)). Some of them seek to migrate further to North America ([Vidra 2013](#)). Another category comprises those individuals who seek asylum in the EU.

Some of the research on Roma has intersected with studies on general patterns of migration in and from Central and Eastern Europe (see [Morosanu, Szilassy and Fox 2012](#)). Concerns about increasing numbers of asylum claimants have led individual EU member states to adopt ethnically framed migration control or highly restrictive immigration policies aimed at discouraging the entry of Roma ([Cahn 2003](#)). Visa regulations for countries in Eastern and South Eastern Europe have had a particular impact on the experience of migrating Roma, independently of whether they intend to apply for asylum.

Europe-wide policy formation

An important part of current scholarly attention has focused on policy formation, especially on the EU level ([Vermeersch 2013](#), [van Baar 2012b](#)). In the context of enlargement, the EU demanded that candidate states enact and implement laws to protect Romani citizens as well as deal with their political, social and economic isolation. In the run-up to the enlargement, NGO reports directed EU attention to the precarious position of the Roma in otherwise successful candidate countries like the Czech Republic or Slovakia. European policymakers became increasingly concerned about the poverty facing many Roma in the region, the increasing spate of racist attacks against them, the apparent lack of protection by the police, the Roma's experiences of unequal treatment in education and the justice system, and the issue of unequal access to public services. Both a legacy of poverty and problematic social policies of the past as well as more recent failures to remedy the situation had created social and spatial segregation between non-Roma and Roma, the results of which became now all the more visible both in urban areas and in the countryside. Important criticism of the Central European governments was included, for example, in the European Commission's key document 'Agenda 2000' ([European Commission 1997](#)), which pointed out that the treatment of minorities in the region was in general satisfactory, except for the situation of the Roma ([Vermeersch 2002](#)). The EU included the topic of the Roma in its discussions on preconditions for EU accession. However, as such pre-accession conditionality appears not to have led to progressive change within the new member states of Central and Eastern Europe, the EU has developed other methods in this field. Most recently, the European Commission has urged member state governments to draw up 'national Roma integration strategies' (NRISs). The idea has been to bring the NRISs together under the umbrella of a coordinated European effort, which would make it easier to compare national policy ideas, practices and commitments, and create new pathways towards more robust monitoring by independent agencies and civil society actors. The European Commission's 2013 assessment report coming out of the first phase of this exercise

focused specifically on the structural preconditions needed in each country. In the coming years, such yearly reports will use information provided by each country, NGOs, international organisations and FRA to review further policy progress. The European Commission also seeks to examine more closely the ways in which member states have used (or failed to use) European Structural and Investment Funds for projects in which Roma are involved – all of this in order to ensure that the budgetary opportunities for Romani inclusion policies that come with European membership are not squandered. Through the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), relatively large budgets have been made available for tackling various aspects of the problems facing the Roma, and conditions have been put into place in order to avoid such funds being used to segregate the Roma even further (as it happened in the past). In the case of the ERDF, for example, projects that are not explicitly aimed at desegregation – such as those that seek to improve housing conditions in a segregated area – will not be eligible for funding ([Sobotka and Vermeersch 2012](#)). In response to such monitoring and reviewing efforts by the European Commission, several member states have revised their national strategies or action plans and set up consultation forums on the implementation of these plans. Expert reports and independent shadow monitoring by NGOs have helped many member states in this regard (e.g. [Rorke 2012](#)).

Looking forward: what can we expect from the field?

In the field of politics and policy studies relating to Roma, we can expect continued attention on developments at EU level and the ensuing responses (or non-responses) of national governments. These developments are likely to be monitored not only by a growing number of independent scholars but also by international institutions and NGOs. An important new development is that more scholars from a Romani background are participating in this field as researchers.

There will be a continuing need for a critical look at what governments can do about the plight of the Roma across Europe. Reflection will be needed on how matters are implemented on the ground and how the politics around these new policies evolve. Obviously a long list could be drawn up of key themes and sub-topics that can and should be studied to push the discussion forward. By way of conclusion, three key issues can be highlighted:

- 1 How are policies implemented locally? The EU's strategic framework for Romani inclusion has led to a growth of policy plans by national governments, but policies will need to interact with specific socio-economic and political configurations on the local level. The responses to such local circumstances will need to be the subject of further detailed empirical research.
- 2 What will happen with anti-Romani discourse? Government policies aimed to help the Roma might unwittingly provide ammunition for those who seek to push Roma away. The current backlash is in some ways perhaps comparable to that created by some communist policies, which failed to alleviate the plight of the Roma but still reinforced hatred against them by suggesting that the Roma were 'privileged' beneficiaries of government help. There will be a continued need to observe how the Roma are politically

framed and reframed. Will they be portrayed as a burden on the national economy, or can they claim their position as co-citizens who deserve economic support and may, in turn, become contributors to Europe's future.

3 What will the long-term effects be of the EU's efforts at overseeing national policies for the social inclusion of Roma? The European Commission wants to compel national governments to devise and implement better social policies using the available EU funding mechanisms. Such EU-led efforts, however, might give domestic politicians an opportunity to evade their own country's responsibility.

For academicians interested in the topic of the Roma more broadly, it is clear that their field of research is likely to continue to grow in the coming years, attracting interest from even more disciplines. In a context where stigma is both historically and socio-economically prevalent, it is important that these studies examine the situation of the Roma in a unbiased and balanced way – for example, through providing research that not only focuses on the dynamics of marginalisation and exclusion but also on social mobility and diversifying life experiences among certain sections of the Roma population, internal and external framing processes, and changing interactions between Roma and non-Roma populations in a variety of political and socio-economic circumstances.

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